

Cedar Oaks Ranch

By KIM GILLILAND, Editor



Jane James and Maurite Scanlan

"Forestry for Youth 2000" brought local seventh graders to the property. Among other topics, they learned about pond management and the food chain.

AS THE bidding began on the steps of the Bullock County Courthouse, Jane James and Maurite Scanlan nervously sized up their competition. They were the only women there to bid on a piece of property that was up for auction. Weeks earlier, they had tried to buy the parcel from the group of seven owners, but could not come to a mutual agreement with them. Some time later, the owners had the land taken away from them because of delinquent payments. That meant the property would go up for auction.

After months of scouring for land within a 100-mile radius, Jane and Maurite had their hearts set on this particular piece of property. But would



One hundred acres of pines were planted on former cattle grazing fields.

it be financially within their reach?

Maurite held a note pad where they had figured up the cost per acre at different prices. Jane would act on their behalf as bidder, while Maurite kept an eye on the numbers. They had agreed on a top price, and as the bidding edged ever closer to that figure, their hearts began to sink. One by one, others quit bidding, until it was just the two women and another bidder. Finally the bidding stopped at their top price, only it was the other bidder who had the advantage. They looked at each other and knew if they were to get that land, it would take a little more money than they had originally planned. Maurite elbowed Jane and gave her the okay to go a little higher. Jane made one more bid and they came out on top. The 360 acres was theirs!

The Work Begins

Now that they owned the property, they began to manage it. Since that day in 1989 when they became partners, they've

come a long way. First on the agenda was to selectively cut some of the timber to gain income and increase productivity of the timber stands already present. They also began planting both pine and hardwood seedlings.

Jane and Maurite say they prefer to select cut instead of clearcutting, but had to clearcut a small parcel when Southern pine beetles were discovered a couple of years ago. They feel lucky to have escaped invasion of the bark beetle for so long, and attribute part of the reason to the fact that they break up their pine plantations with hardwood plantings. The hardwoods serve as both buffer zones and wildlife corridors and add to the diversity of their TREASURE Forest.

Several acres of the property had been leased for cattle grazing before they bought the land, and they continued this practice for several years. In time, this land has been converted to trees as well. In 1991, they contracted with Frank Brabham to plant 100 acres of improved

loblolly pines. Uncooperative weather would not allow burning the land for site preparation, so they decided to bushhog the area instead. Before the planting began, Jane and Maurite rode over the area on horseback to scout out rough terrain and large potholes. Then each took turns on the tractor, bushhogging directly in front of the tree-planting machine. After the initial planting they continued to bushhog in between the rows three times a year for two years instead of using herbicides for grass control. The survival rate for the seedlings was "incredible," says Jane. "No one can believe they're nine years old." When finished planting the 100 acres, they still had seedlings left over. Always innovative, the ladies had the leftover seedlings planted in the shape of a C and an O as an abbreviation for Cedar Oaks Ranch.

Much of the 360 acres was without roads, so that, too, became a priority. They hired someone to construct firelanes and roads both around the perimeter and



Mature pines were selectively cut to increase productivity of the stand.



Trees such as this shagbark hickory have been identified along the dendrology trail.

internally. "You can't have enough firelanes as far as we're concerned," says Jane. In addition to roadwork, trails for horseback riding and walking were also developed. "All along, Jane and I were making trails," says Maurite. "We maintain all our firelanes," she adds. Each firelane is numbered with an easy-to-read sign. This way, explains Jane, they are able to keep track of where family members are or where to send workers.

Learning and Working

When it came time to do their first prescribed burning, Jane and Maurite were eager to help and learn all they could. Former Forestry Commission ranger Wayne Roberts conducted their first prescribed burn. Three years later, Bullock County Manager Bill Clem supervised a burn and since then they've done some burning on their own.

To improve forage for wildlife, Jane and Maurite decided to plant 1,000 bicolor lespedeza seedlings. They gathered three other family members and planted them all by hand, a much bigger job than anyone had anticipated. That experience led to purchasing a seeder, and they found it to be just as effective in establishing lespedeza plants. Luckily, many plants beneficial to wildlife were already on the property. An abundance of crab apple and wild plum trees provide soft mast for wildlife.

Another project was to plant 11 acres of hardwood seedlings four years ago. Sawtooth oak, overcup oak, cherrybark oak, Shumard oak and yellow poplar were the main species planted.

It took several years to get the property ready for TREASURE Forest status, and they reached that goal in June 1993. Continued management and improvements led to Cedar Oaks Ranch being named the Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award winner for the southeast region in 1999.

County Manager Bill Clem praises the two women for all they've accomplished. "They've learned by experience and by sharing with and helping others," he said. "They pretty much started from ground zero. They've done things in stages and it's just now sort of jelled. You can see their love and appreciation for the property."

"We never dreamt we'd be where we are," said Jane. Both agree that all the



Native foods like wild plums are abundant at Cedar Oaks Ranch.

work has been a lot of pleasure as well. "You're constantly learning new things," adds Maurite. "You're building memories."

Environmental Education

Maurite and Jane both became active members of the Bullock County Forestry Planning Committee and were instrumental in helping form a county chapter of the Alabama TREASURE Forest Association. Their involvement with the two groups inspired them to use their property to educate local youth about the importance of forestry.

They started on a small scale about three years ago and began giving tours to different age groups. On May 4 of this year, two busloads of seventh graders visited the property. They had a walking tour of the property where stops were made on wildlife, tree identification, the history of forestry and how trees work, pond management, and an enviroscape model. In addition, they watched as logs were sawed by a portable sawmill and saw a birds of prey program put on by the Montgomery Zoo. Members of the planning committee and local agency personnel acted as group leaders and cooked lunch for the students.

The dendrology trail is an impressive part of Cedar Oaks Ranch. Approximately 40 trees have been identified along the trail, which is situated in an area of mature trees, mostly hardwoods. For each

tree identified, a laminated information sheet has been mounted on a cross-section of a tree that is attached to a post. The signage is durable and attractive. In addition to tours, the tree identification trail is used by local 4-H teams to train for forestry competitions.

"We enjoy it just as much as they do," says Maurite of the student tours. One of their goals is to spark an interest in young people to possibly go into the field of forestry.

Recreation

Jane and Maurite both enjoy horseback riding, as do other members of their family. Cedar Oaks is used for many different recreational activities including fishing, hiking, hunting, picnicking and camping.

There were several small ponds on the property when Maurite and Jane purchased it, but they wanted something bigger. A large gully near the middle of the property provided a natural area to construct a 12-acre pond. The large, irregularly shaped pond is the centerpiece of the property. An island was left at one end for waterfowl to use. Recycled materials were used to build a dock, and a small amphitheater provides seating for about 25 near the water's edge. Once a year they have a "fishing rodeo" where family and invited friends can catch and keep all the fish they want.

Their families enjoy working and playing on the property. "All of our adult children have pitched in and enjoy it as much as we do," said Jane. She and husband Tom have two children. Son Morgan, who is married to Ashley, is a forester. His exposure to forest management at Cedar Oaks helped him choose forestry as a profession. Daughter Tiffany is married to Bill and they have one child and are expecting another. Maurite and husband Joe have three children: Jeanine and husband David have two children; Greg and wife Nan have one child; and John and wife Sharon have one child.

Managing Cedar Oaks according to the TREASURE Forest management plan is a lot of work, both Jane and Maurite will attest. But they love every minute of the effort. That dedication to making it better is what makes Cedar Oaks Ranch one of Alabama's premier TREASURE Forests. 🌲